

Power and White: Race, Class, and Sexuality in Kansas City's Urban Renewal

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in sociology and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: February 10, 2012

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certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Date approved: February 10, 2012

## Abstract

*This paper explores the role of non-hegemonic sexualities in urban renewal through a case study of a Kansas City, Missouri redevelopment project. Using document analysis, interviews, and participant observation, I argue that sexual diversity is co-opted in a raced, classed, and gendered way that advances growth objectives and reinforces heteronormativity and the bourgeois cultural and social values of private property and conspicuous consumption. While economically privileged, white, gay males are courted and attempts are made to co-opt them as drivers of renewal, non-conforming sexual expressions, such as sex work, pornography, and much of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community are excluded. The privatization of once-public spaces effectively reifies bourgeois moral boundaries to protect new consumer spaces from sexual, racial, and class “others,” and allows space to become a tool for capital accumulation.*

## Introduction

With the onset of suburbanization in post-World War II United States, metropolitan regions across the nation experienced rapidly declining central cities. The channeling of vital resources away from inner cities and towards suburbs resulted in dilapidated infrastructure and increasing urban poverty (Avila and Rose 2009). Since the 1980s, cities have taken increasingly dramatic measures to revive their downtowns, ranging from the militant eviction of homeless people from Tompkins Square Park in New York's Lower East Side (Smith 1996) to the implementation of large-scale, government-backed urban renewal efforts (Davidson and Lees 2010; Hackworth 2007). The trend has been towards public-private mega-projects that attempt to harness "culture" as a tool for urban regeneration (Miles and Paddison 2005). This generally means the construction of areas for the exclusive consumption of culture—art, food, fashion, music, tourism—resulting in public spaces devoted to consumption rather than tolerance or social solidarity (Zukin 1998). Increasingly, however, consumption of culture also concerns people and place, with diversity—sexual, racial, ethnic, etc.—becoming a sought-after demographic characteristic for business and tourism (Hoffman 2003; Zukin 1998). As Rose states, "post-industrial cities have a growing interest in marketing themselves as being built on a foundation of 'inclusive' neighborhoods capable of harmoniously supporting a blend of incomes, cultures, age-groups, and lifestyles" (2004:281). With the popularization of Richard Florida's (2002) "creative class" thesis,<sup>1</sup> many cities have attempted to do just this.

Given this appeal to diversity, remarkably little scholarly research has been devoted to the role of sexual diversity in large-scale urban renewal (for notable exceptions see Delany 1999; Hubbard 2004; Papayanis 2000). Thus the purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between urban renewal and sexualities by using a Kansas City, Missouri urban renewal project

as a case study. This project, called the Power and Light District (henceforth P&L), is a large-scale effort between the city of Kansas City and the Cordish Company, a private real estate development firm. From its inception, project proponents have touted the P&L's diverse appeal, sometimes even citing Florida's "creative class" thesis (Collison 2003b), but the project has also been plagued by accusations of racial, sexual, gender, and class discrimination. Why do these perceptions exist for an area meant to increase Kansas City's cosmopolitan appeal?

Many scholars contend that gentrification and urban renewal are exclusionary, through forced eviction or segregation of marginalized groups or displacement through rising rents (Davidson and Lees 2010; Hackworth 2007; Hubbard 2004)—what Neil Smith (1996) calls the "revanchist city." I devote part of my analysis to evaluating whether or to what extent Kansas City's urban renewal efforts are characterized by this revanchist element before moving on to an examination of two ways by which sexual diversity is mobilized in this redevelopment project. My central argument is two-fold. First, dedication to a pro-economic growth ideology allows once-public spaces to be privatized as a tool for capital accumulation, effectively reifying bourgeois moral boundaries to protect these redeveloped urban consumer spaces from sexual, racial, and class "others." Second, sexual diversity is co-opted in this process in a raced, classed, and gendered way that advances growth objectives and reinforces the heterosexual, white, middle-class, values of heteronormativity, private property, and conspicuous consumption. While economically privileged, white, gay males are courted by developers as ideal consumers and a marketable form of diversity, non-conforming sexual expressions, such as sex work, pornography, and much of the queer community are excluded.

This paper is organized into several major sections. I begin with a discussion of the literature on gentrification and sexuality before laying the conceptual framework for the rest of

the study, which includes elements of Neil Smith's (1996) revanchist city heuristic and Logan and Molotch's (1987) classic "growth machine" theory. I present my findings in two major subsections, first showing the class-based revanchism on which Kansas City's urban renewal is dependent, and then how sexualities are mobilized in service of this economic growth agenda. I conclude with a discussion of the implications these developments have for access to public space and sexual equality.

## **Background**

### *What is Gentrification?*

Scholars have debated the constitutive properties of gentrification for decades, and disagreement remains (Brown-Saracino 2010; Davidson 2011). Traditionally defined, gentrification involves the rehabilitation of existing structures in a dilapidated urban area by an influx of middle-class residents who usher in this process (Lambert and Boddy 2002). But gentrification is a dynamic process, which has led some scholars to consider new-build developments part of the overall process of gentrification (Davidson and Lees 2010). Some scholars argue that this is an over-application of the term (Lambert and Boddy 2002), but Smith asserts that:

In my own research I began making a strict distinction between gentrification (which involved rehabilitation of existing stock) and redevelopment that involved wholly new construction...and at a time when gentrification was distinguishing itself from large-scale urban renewal this made some sense. But I no longer feel that it is such a useful distinction...Gentrification is no longer about a narrow and quixotic oddity in the housing market but has become the leading residential edge of a much larger endeavor: the class remake of the central urban landscape (Smith 1996:39).

Critical consensus has coalesced around at least one aspect of Smith's definition: gentrification is a class-based phenomenon (Davidson 2011). Given the constantly changing nature of social structures and the current cultural turn urban renewal has taken, Smith's definition seems the

more appropriate. Ultimately, whether economic rebuilding of urban areas is labeled gentrification, urban renewal, or something else, the goal is identical—the class remake of urban space.

Gentrification and urban renewal are often justified on the grounds that they fix the poor urban tax base and break up concentrated poverty (Lees 2008). Because of the alleged taxation benefits, governments often encourage or even sponsor large-scale urban renewal efforts (Hackworth 2007; Lees 2008; Murphy 2008; Smith 2002). Governments and other entities may also tout gentrification as a way of engendering social mixing, though evidence suggests that little inter-group mixing occurs. As Lees (2008:2463) asserts, social mixing policies construct the middle-class as natural and desirable while demonizing lower classes.

Urban renewal is increasingly accomplished via private control of public spaces (Murphy 2008; Raco 2003; Zukin 1998) or ever-harsher restrictions on the use of public space (Raco 2003; Ranasinghe 2011; Staeheli and Mitchell 2006), which leads to exclusion. Smith (1996), for instance, found that working-class and minority residents are steadily priced out of gentrified areas (see also Atkinson 2004; Wyly and Hammel 2004). Rather than engendering social mixing, gentrification tends to segregate diverse populations, and those relegated to less desirable areas are consistently poor and minority residents.

### *Sex and Gentrification*

Sexualities, particularly LGBTQ sexualities, have long played a role in gentrification. Gay men were at the forefront of gentrification efforts in many cities, including West Hollywood, CA, Greenwich Village, NY, and Soho in London (Bell and Valentine 1995; Collins 2004; Knopp 1995). LGBTQ neighborhoods are often looked upon favorably as manifestations of increased acceptance of LGBTQ people, and these areas frequently become fashionable

entertainment and shopping districts for heterosexuals (Binnie and Skeggs 2004). These spaces arose in response to oppression and hostility, and in addition to providing relatively safe areas for LGBTQ people to live and do business, they also create a “power base where the gay vote is significant” (Bell and Valentine 1995:5). This is an important development in a society where space is “produced as heterosexual, heterosexist, and heteronormative” (ibid:18), for it provides areas where hegemonic heteronormative scripts can be challenged. Gay villages, however, have been criticized for becoming commodified areas of consumption and spectacle and excluding large portions of the LGBTQ community that do not have the cultural and economic capital to take part in conspicuous consumption (Bell and Binnie 2004; Sibalis 2004).

While the creation of LGBTQ urban spaces certainly has positive effects for queer populations, it also has negative consequences. On the one hand, the concentration of sexual minorities in urban spaces makes it easier to develop communities, networks, and spaces based on sexuality, and for this reason these subcultures tend to be more developed in large cities. On the other hand, this concentration also makes it easier to control and demonize sexual “others.” Knopp (1995:149) argues that, “the portrayal of gentrified gay neighborhoods...as centres of hedonism and self-indulgence, of other gay entertainment areas...as dangerous sadomasochistic underworlds, of red-light districts as threatening to ‘family values,’ of ‘non-white’ neighbourhoods as centres of rape, or, alternatively, of suburbs as places of blissful monogamous (and patriarchal) heterosexuality” makes such surveillance possible. Here, Knopp makes an important connection between racialized and sexualized spaces—that is, both are seen as threatening to white, middle-class, heterosexual values. This is a common theme throughout U.S. history, wherein class, race, gender, and ethnicity are all colored by sexual norms and values (Nagel 2003). This is especially true of the black-white color line in the United States, where



black sexuality has historically been seen as uncontrollable, and black male sexuality, in particular, is seen as dangerous to white women (Bardaglio 1999; di Leonardo 1997).

All types of sexual non-conformity, however, may affect an area. Perhaps the best-known example of this is New York City's Times Square. Before its "cleanup" in the mid-1990s, Times Square was home to many adult movie theaters and stores and was a popular area for sex workers and LGBTQ people, many of whom were also racial minorities (Delany 1999). These areas, even more so than LGBTQ neighborhoods, have been decried as negatively impacting society through such "secondary effects" as declining property values, increased crime, and a negative impact on "legitimate" business (Papayanis 2000). Such secondary effects are often substantiated by impact studies, though as Papayanis reveals in her study of Times Square's cleanup, these studies often rely on "expert" testimony from the very real estate executives who stand to benefit the most from clearing out sex shops. In fact, the impact study conducted by the New York City Department of City Planning and offered in support of Mayor Giuliani's proposal to zone out sex shops concludes that "The analysis of trends in assessed valuation relative to adult entertainment uses was inconclusive" (quoted in Papayanis 2000:345). Citing such flawed impact studies as evidence, in a 1967 case the Supreme Court upheld legislation allowing adult entertainment to be zoned out of areas in order to protect the quality of a city's neighborhoods (*ibid.*). In the end, Papayanis concludes that such regulation of sexualized spaces serves to reinforce privileged forms of sexual expression, specifically heterosexual monogamy. Similarly, in a review of the geographies of sex-related businesses, Hubbard et al (2008) observe that whereas sex-related businesses have traditionally been relegated to the margins of cities, certain types of businesses have migrated to the central city, indicating both a privileging of

certain types of corporate investment and a normalization of certain forms of homosociality and heterosexuality.

Gentrification and urban renewal often speak to an acceptance of diversity, but as Hubbard (2004) notes, the consumer city sets up a paradox: all are apparently welcome, but only so long as they act in a manner deemed appropriate by the real estate developer. Binnie and Skeggs (2004) further note that as Manchester's gay village became more popular among heterosexuals, the more "extreme" aspects of the queer community disappeared. A recent study of Atlanta also found that as LGBTQ neighborhoods become more fashionable, they attract more heterosexuals, who not only further drive up housing costs but may also be less tolerant of LGBTQ people and the businesses that serve them (Doan and Higgins 2011). While "first-wave" gentrifiers tended to seek and be accepting of a socially diverse urban experience (Butler and Lees 2006), the trend may be shifting.

#### *Revanchism and the Growth Machine*

As gentrification demonstrates, space, its meaning, and who is allowed to inhabit it are all contested, and because of this, space not only reflects and reinforces social inequalities, it also engenders social relations. Unequal access to public space draws attention to inequalities stemming from such social categories as race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality and reveals various people's differing right to the city. As Tonkiss (2005:5) argues, "The politics of urban space...concerns not only contests staged *in* the city, but contests over competing rights *to* the city. One of the primary rights to the city is the claim to common public space." Public space is often considered to be an essential component of a democratic society—a place for the free exchange of ideas and the intermingling of diverse social groups (Harvey 2006; Low and Smith 2006).

What exactly constitutes public space, however, is complicated by the rise of privatism<sup>2</sup> in urban spaces. Private banking and real estate interests often seek to privatize urban environments for (re)development and private profit (Gottdiener 1994), blurring the line between public and private space. These “growth machine” (Molotch 1976) actors are primarily concerned with the exchange value of urban land and its potential for capital accumulation, generally discounting the use value of public spaces. Thus, the use value of the majority is traded for the exchange gains of the few and represents a transfer of wealth from the general public to the rentier class (Logan and Molotch 1987). Tonkiss (2005:74) summarizes simply: “If different types of public space stand for different ways of being together in public (collectivity, social exchange, informal encounter), the privatization of public spaces valorizes relationships based on private interest.” In place of traditional public spaces, private capital delivers what Davis (1992:226) calls “pseudo-public spaces,” such as “sumptuary malls, office centers, cultural acropolises and so on.” Consumption thus ascends as the “primary urban function” (Christopherson 1994:410).

This assertion is especially true of the most recent manifestation of urban renewal: large-scale, top-down, public-private mega-projects. Such projects have the potential to displace many people and can result in the rapid redefinition of space and place, which has led Neil Smith (1996) to label this trend the “revanchist city.” After the defeat of Napoleon III’s government in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Parisian working-class took over the city for several months. Determined to reinstate bourgeois morality and order to the streets of Paris, the revanchists sought out enemies and enacted vicious revenge upon them for “stealing” their vision of French society from them. In Smith’s model, the middle-class “ordinary citizens” reclaim the city from

economic, racial, ethnic and sexual “others,” to whom they had left the city in their flight to the suburbs.

Drawing on insights from this era of French history, Smith theorizes a modern process in which there is a concerted effort by the ruling-classes to retake the urban “frontier.” At the heart of this newly conceptualized revanchism is the fear of losing power, particularly economic power:

a race/class/gender terror felt by middle- and ruling-class whites who are suddenly stuck in place by a ravaged property market, the threat and reality of unemployment, the decimation of social services, and the emergence of minority and immigrant groups, as well as women, as powerful urban actors (Smith 1996:211).

Smith largely focuses on the economic aspects of revanchism, but he also writes that it may be characterized overall as “revenge against minorities, the working class, women, environmental legislation, gays and lesbian,” (Smith 1996:44) to which Papayanis (2000) adds sexual nonconformity of all types. Thus, while urban renewal may be aimed at a class remake of the city, an analysis of revanchism requires an intersectional approach, such that the intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality are all taken seriously.

Recent notions that diversity and cosmopolitanism attract the “creative class” to cities, however, contradict the idea that cities wish to exclude “others.” The creation of a cosmopolitan space requires that certain people be let in and others excluded, and these exclusionary boundaries are often raced and classed (Binnie and Skeggs 2004). Research further suggests that a desire for diversity is more of a way to identify as cosmopolitan than a true desire to interact with people of differing backgrounds (Butler and Robson 2001), and when people do interact with diverse others, it is often with “non-threatening others” who are just different enough to be considered “other,” such as white, gay men (Binnie and Skeggs 2004). The rapid redefinition of a renewed space, then, requires boundary-work, and as Lamont and Molnar (2002) assert,

boundaries may be revealed in space. For example, Sharon Zukin (1993) argues that power manifests itself in material form through architecture, and the urban cityscape may be read as a “landscape of power.” The “neo-military syntax” of contemporary architecture is read immediately by pariah groups as a warning to stay away (Davis 1992), and if that is not enough, closed-circuit cameras and private security forces remind such groups that they are being monitored. Dress codes, laws, and other policies all further reveal the institutionalization and territorialization of symbolic boundaries<sup>3</sup>.

With the shift from localized gentrification to large-scale urban renewal and cities’ apparently paradoxical appeal to diversity, we are finally led to question what role sexualities play in urban renewal today. If only certain diverse “others” are to be admitted to renewed urban spaces, how and why are these particular boundaries maintained? These are the issues this paper will address going forward.

## **Studying Kansas City’s Urban Renewal**

### *Why Kansas City?*

Historically, urban sociologists have studied large urban centers, but as scholars have pointed out, smaller cities can teach us much about the urban experience (Brown-Saracino 2008). With a population of approximately 460,000 in a metropolitan region of 2.1 million, Kansas City, Missouri is a typical mid-sized Midwestern city. Its two largest racial groups, whites (63%) and blacks (29%), are likewise similar to other Midwestern cities, as is its history. During the post-World War II era, Kansas City’s downtown began a long-term decline in both population and economic centrality. Kansas City remains the anchoring city of the metropolitan region, but the suburbs are now self-sufficient political entities that provide many of the resources and attractions that once drew people downtown (Gotham 2001:288). A series of failed attempts at

urban renewal beginning in the 1960s resulted in the dilapidated conditions of Kansas City's downtown that precipitated the Power and Light (P&L) District project.

The P&L project itself is reflective of larger global processes and can help us better understand large-scale, top-down urban renewal generally, not just in Kansas City. Serious planning for the project began in 2003 under the leadership of Mayor Kay Barnes and resulted in a \$350 million public-private project between Kansas City and the Cordish Company. The project consists of eight square blocks of mixed-use development, ranging from bars and restaurants to retail and (currently undeveloped) residential space. While over half of the project was funded by the city, Cordish retains control over the P&L and exerts significant influence in the urban core. This is illustrative of the larger national and global trend in urban renewal wherein specialized firms are hired to develop mega-projects through public-private partnerships with cities (Murphy 2008; Smith 2002; Spierings 2009). Kansas City and the P&L can also contribute to our understanding of the effects of neoliberalism and the increasingly global mentality of privatism.

### *Data*

I employed an in-depth case study involving document analysis, interviews, and participant-observation to examine Kansas City's urban renewal. Long held in high regard for studying urban settings, the case study approach allows the researcher to become intimately acquainted with the details of a specific case and can offer empirical and theoretical gains in understanding larger social forces (Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg 1991). I analyzed approximately 200 newspaper articles in addition to city council records, real estate development documents, court records, business directories, community group documents (press materials, annual reports, committee minutes, etc.), and local blogs. I found newspaper articles by searching several online

databases for keywords pertinent to the P&L project and selected those that reflected a substantive focus on the project. Because documents are produced in a matrix of power relations (Altheide 1996; Smith 2005), and the decisions to write, publish, and preserve texts are all influenced by these relations (Gallo 2009), I attempted to include various standpoints<sup>4</sup> in my document analysis. For example, I included articles from the *Kansas City Star*, Kansas City's mainstream newspaper, the *KC Call*, its weekly black community newspaper, *The Pitch*, a local weekly paper known to be politically liberal, and the *KC Business Journal*. Documents were coded for themes such as economic rationale, social justice, blight/dystopian discourse, and moral language. While some codes were developed based on elements of Neil Smith's revanchist city thesis (1996) and Atkinson's (2003) framework for evaluating the presence of revanchist policy and discourse, others were identified through a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2004). Thus, I began the document analysis with several preconceived themes pertinent to the revanchist thesis (e.g. economic rationale, dystopian discourse), but allowed other themes, including those contrary to the revanchist model such as "social justice," to emerge as I analyzed the data.

I also conducted seven semi-structured interviews with an urban planner, community residents, community group leaders, social activists, and a downtown business leader, and employed participant observation to supplement and contextualize my document analysis. Interviews and fieldwork were especially informative regarding issues of sexuality, as references to sexuality were rather rare in the document analysis. Interviewees ranged in age from their early twenties to late forties. Six interviewees were male; one was female. Five were white, one black, and one Latino. Five likewise identified as gay or queer, and two identified as heterosexual. Interviewees were selected purposively and were recruited either through cold-

calling or personal contacts. Following DeVault and Gross (2007), I attempted to engage in collaborative conversations with my interviewees, allowing them to tell their stories and only loosely guiding the conversation. Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to nearly two hours, with the average interview lasting about 45 minutes. I recorded, transcribed, and then coded interviews for themes similar to those in the document analysis. Moral language and meta-narratives were especially important in coding interviews, as they demonstrate ways people make sense of experience and how discourse limits such expression (Sprague 2005).

I spent approximately 10 hours in the Power and Light District from May 2011 to September 2011 to see who routinely used the area, how they were treated, how they acted, and more generally to get a feel for the environment. I conducted part of my field work during the Kansas City Gay Pride Festival, which was held in the Power and Light District June 3-5, 2011, in order to compare that time to more routine days in the P&L. Lastly, I attended a KC Pride community meeting regarding venue selection for the 2012 festival because controversy over the decision to hold Pride in the P&L continues in the queer community, and the meeting provided an opportunity for me to hear community members voice their concerns and support.

I approached the data and this project from a “system-centered” approach to intersectionality (Choo and Ferree 2010). That is, I viewed race, class, gender, and sexuality as being at work in every situation and institutional setting and conceptualized inequalities as always determined by the particular historical and local processes in which they were found. I therefore attempt to draw attention to the ways these categories interact to produce inclusion or exclusion, including focusing a critical lens on often unmarked categories, such as whiteness, heterosexuality, maleness, and middle-class socio-economic status.



## Findings

I present my findings in several subsections addressing the major concerns of this paper. I begin with an analysis of recent city and public-private initiatives and the discourse surrounding them in order to explore the possibility that a revanchist politics of urban renewal is emerging in Kansas City. The subsequent sections analyze two local cases involving the regulation of sexuality in Kansas City in an effort to evaluate how sexuality is implicated in the remake of the central city. Finally, I bring these two strands together to illustrate how sexualities are differentially employed in service of economic growth objectives.

### *Planning for Power*

Discourse regarding the Power and Light (P&L) was permeated by a pro-growth ideology, such that little aside from economic growth was considered in the plan. This ideology, as I elaborate below, essentially posits that economic growth is the solution to all urban woes, including social and cultural inequities. The adage “a rising [economic] tide raises all boats” aptly describes Kansas City’s approach to urban renewal.

The Downtown Council of Kansas City (DTC), according to its website, is “a non-profit, member-based organization that is devoted to the belief that a healthy, vibrant, and economically vital downtown is central to the success of the entire region” ([www.downtownkc.org](http://www.downtownkc.org)). It provides many services in the Central Business District (CBD), such as graffiti and trash removal, panhandling intervention, and referrals for homeless people. While these may be beneficial services, a closer inspection of the council’s website and press materials shows underlying economic objectives for these social services.

Goals of creating a safe and clean downtown are, in fact, “integral to the economic vitality of our community” ([www.downtownkc.org](http://www.downtownkc.org)), and welcoming diverse and vibrant cultures

is “the catalyst for attracting investment and economic activity” (ibid.). It appears that Kansas City elites have taken Richard Florida’s (2002) advice seriously, making every attempt to attract the “creative class.” Publicity materials from the DTC boast that 6,000 artists live in Kansas City, 308 arts related businesses employ 4,500 people in the city, and \$973 million has been invested in arts and culture in downtown since 2000. As the DTC states, its social services are only in support of its “overarching mission to create an economically vibrant downtown.”

The DTC is not the only entity to espouse an economic rationale as the ultimate objective of urban renewal. The Economic Development Council (EDC) states that its “focus is on job growth, investment, tax revenues, sustainable development, and the ongoing beautification of Kansas City, Missouri, as a locale that is attractive to businesses” ([www.edckc.com](http://www.edckc.com)). On its own, this is not an issue, but as a city-supported agency the EDC receives vast powers in determining urban land development, and, in fact, wields the city’s most powerful development tool: tax increment financing (TIF). TIF essentially allows projects to be funded by future property, sales, utility, and earnings taxes generated by a redeveloped area, dramatically decreasing the initial investment necessary for a private developer to begin a project. The TIF Commission is further endowed with the power of eminent domain, allowing it to condemn businesses and residences standing in the path of economic development.

Mayor Barnes relied heavily on the EDC and TIF to accomplish her goal of redeveloping the CBD and many other areas<sup>5</sup>. The Power and Light deal alone added \$295 million to the city’s TIF debt, which was to be covered by Super-TIF, a special kind of TIF that plows back 100% of taxes into the project, meaning the city gains no new tax revenue from the P&L until the bonds are paid in 23 years. The P&L has yet to generate enough revenue to cover its annual debt service, forcing the city to subsidize payments to private developers in the amount of \$4.7

million in 2008 and \$11.5 million in 2009. In July 2010, the city estimated it would have to subsidize the P&L bonds by \$10-\$15 million per year for as long as the bonds are outstanding. The 500-page P&L proposal that resulted in these shortcomings was given to the TIF Commission just moments before the hearing began, yet it passed that same day in a 7-2 vote, suggesting an overriding dedication to economic development regardless of cost. A close inspection of the proposal actually reveals that TIF financing for the P&L results in tax revenue loss for the Kansas City, Missouri school district during 12 of the 23 years that TIF will be in place, a quite real concern given the district's recent loss of accreditation. A later amendment passed in a similarly rushed manner without public comment gave control of the public right-of-way, including sidewalks, to Cordish. Perhaps the decision to adopt the plan is best justified by the warning from C.H. Johnson Consulting, "It is important for the future Kansas City, Missouri's economic stability that this project be completed. If not...Kansas City will miss out on an opportunity to attract and retain tax dollars" (South Loop Entertainment District MODESA Application 2004:178). In actuality, an independent consulting firm found that Super-TIF yields no net financial benefit to the city (Horsley 2007).

Despite these drawbacks and evidence that TIF is unnecessary,<sup>6</sup> the economic rationale necessary to support ideas like TIF abound in the discourse created around downtown renewal. When a new mayor took office in 2007 and called for a temporary halt on new TIF projects while policy was developed to strike a balance between economic growth and social justice, he was immediately lambasted. Council members likened the temporary halt to hanging a "closed" sign on the city and warned that Mayor Funkhouser had overstepped his bounds. One councilman asserted that "there's a solid majority on the council that believes in economic development and that it's the engine that drives neighborhoods forward" (Collison 2007). Mayor

Funkhouser was a one-term mayor. These events and the related discourse suggest an exceedingly strong dedication to economic growth, even at the cost of social services. Kansas City's mechanisms for declaring land blighted also reveals a process undergirded by an economic growth ideology with little concern for social development and little accountability to elected officials.

### *The Racial Face of Eminent Domain*

The area where the P&L now stands was originally declared blighted in 1970 by the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA), a semi-governmental entity responsible to its board of directors (not the city), which is selected largely from the Kansas City business community. Significant controversy surrounded this decision, and it eventually culminated in a case brought before the Missouri Supreme Court by local business owners who claimed that the area was not blighted because “only approximately 28% of the buildings in the project area are deteriorated or substandard to a degree requiring clearance...and only approximately 14% of the entire area is occupied by such buildings” (*Parking Systems v. Downtown Redevelopment Corporation* 1974). The court, however, deferred to the LCRA's determination of blight, indicting a high degree of private sector control over development decisions. The project hit many roadblocks over the next 30 years, and the area languished under threat of condemnation until the P&L proposal was adopted in 2004. Ultimately, the blight declaration served to devalue the properties in the area, priming them for acquisition.

In declaring the downtown loop blighted, the city also opened the way for the TIF Commission to invoke eminent domain, and it did so extensively. Of the 53 properties acquired to make way for the P&L, 16 (30%) were condemned. Eminent domain is generally reserved for projects that serve the public, such as roads, schools, and other infrastructure projects, so the use

of that power to clear land for a privately-owned entertainment district created significant controversy. In a 5-4 decision in the case of *Kelo vs. New London, Connecticut*, however, the Supreme Court ruled that taking private property, even if it is not blighted, for “carefully considered economic development” is legal as long as it benefits the community through such means as generating new taxes or creating new jobs. Here, once again, we find economic rationale justified through the rhetoric of “highest and best use.” As the Institute for Justice, which represented the New London homeowners, said, “no property in America is safe because anyone’s home can create more jobs if it is replaced by a business and any small business can generate greater taxes if replaced by a bigger one” (Garbus 2004). Two Kansas City cases illustrate this favoritism of big capital.

Gigi’s Wig Shop, formerly located near what is now the P&L, was a small business that had been in the same building for 20 years when the TIF Commission offered to acquire it. Gigi’s stood just outside the boundaries set for the P&L development, and the city provided Gigi’s owner with no concrete reason for why he was being asked to sell (Martin 2005). When he refused to sell, the city began condemnation proceedings, eventually forcing Gigi’s to close. The land was then sold to Copaken, White, and Blitt, a major downtown real estate developer, in exchange for land Copaken owned within the entertainment district bounds. Copaken intended to convert the land into a surface parking lot—the type of “physical blight” that the city allegedly wanted eradicated (*ibid.*). Comments from another developer who previously attempted to buy Gigi’s may reveal ulterior motives: “There are certain things we won’t have in the project. It’s not a racist thing. It’s a matter of taste” (Shelly 1997). Nearly all of Gigi’s customers were black.

Another successful local business with a largely black clientele shared Gigi’s fate. American Formal Wear, formerly located in what is now the heart of the P&L, was similarly

condemned. After the owner of AFW, Daryl Penner, refused to sell, the city took him to court. A jury eventually awarded Penner \$1.1 million for his business, up from the city's offer of \$593,000. Penner, however, remained upset that he was not offered a new location within the downtown loop where his clients have known him to be for decades, and, in fact, after relocating to Mission, KS, AFW went out of business.

Other relocations were not dependent on eminent domain. Cordish struck a deal with the city to move a bus stop out of the P&L area, and as the *Pitch* reports, the only two bus lines currently running through the P&L serve predominantly white neighborhoods (Martin 2007). Cordish also vehemently opposed a proposed light rail line that would border the P&L. Several day labor centers in downtown were convinced to relocate, and Cordish even negotiated with the Kansas City Division of Employment Security, a state unemployment office, to move it out of the area. Finally, “in a combination of self-interest and compassion” (Collison 2010), the DTC partnered with Episcopal Community Services to build a new dining facility for the Kansas City homeless population. The former facility was on the west side of the P&L, and the shelter was on the east side, forcing many homeless people to migrate across the refurbished downtown to receive a meal. As Collison continues, “the long walk—about 3.6 miles roundtrip—is not only a hassle for the homeless, but it didn’t help with renewed efforts to market downtown.” While the relocation surely made life more convenient for many homeless people, thinly veiled economic objectives reveal the DTC’s intent. The relocations pursued by the city for the P&L reveal the intersecting race and class revanchism engendered by devotion to economic growth. By removing businesses and institutions that predominantly served racial minorities and lower- and working-class people, the city, with Cordish as its agent, is effectively communicating that those groups are not part of Kansas City’s urban renewal vision and are not welcome within its

bounds. Several policy decisions also work to reify these race and class boundaries, as the following section demonstrates.

*Revanchist Policy or Justified Precautions?*

In the spring of 2007, Kansas City began reworking its panhandling restrictions, with special attention to five entertainment districts, one of which was the P&L. Despite the city's existing law banning "aggressive panhandling," Councilman John Fairfield proposed an ordinance that would outlaw all forms of panhandling (including street performances and "passive panhandling" such as putting out a hat without verbally requesting money). The ordinance aimed only at designated entertainment districts. The proposal states its goal "is to protect citizens from fear, harassment, and intimidation accompanying panhandling, which has become an unwelcome, overwhelming, and dangerous presence in certain parts of the city" (Helling 2007). In a statement endorsing the proposed law, the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce agreed that panhandling was a matter of public safety and referred to panhandlers as "visual blight" (Helling and Horsley 2007).

The proposal was eventually amended to ban "aggressive panhandling" city-wide and "verbal panhandling" in five entertainment areas, including the P&L. Only "passive panhandling" is allowed within entertainment districts, though not near store entrances. Interestingly, without informing the city council, the Kansas City Police Department announced it would not enforce the law because it believed the ordinance to be unconstitutional. The law, however, remains on the books, and the P&L, with its private security force, continues to enforce it (Janovy 2008).

In a separate move, the DTC has also dispatched community ambassadors to help clear the downtown streets of homeless people. The DTC Community Improvement District's 2010-11

annual report boasts 5,587 homeless contacts and referrals and 908 aggressive panhandler interventions (DTC CID Annual Report 2011). Community ambassadors also took up posts at freeway exit ramps known for panhandling and distributed pamphlets reading “aggressive panhandling will stop when people stop rewarding such behavior—it’s that simple” (Martin 2009). Such zero tolerance laws and attitudes are characteristic of revanchist urban policy (Atkinson 2003; Smith 1996).

More recently, the city tightened its youth curfew, once again specifically targeting five designated entertainment areas. The new policy, which took effect August 19, 2011, sets a 10 P.M. curfew for youths 15 and under and an 11 P.M. curfew for 16 and 17-year-olds citywide. In the five designated entertainment districts, however, the curfew is 9 P.M. for all youths under 18. The former curfew was a uniform 11 P.M. on weekdays and midnight on weekends citywide. The council also amended the punishment for a first-time curfew violation from \$1 to a maximum of \$500.

This was not the first time this issue had emerged. In 2010, the city convened a summit concerning large groups of teens amassing in shopping and entertainment areas and concluded that more free and reduced-price activities for youth were needed. Neither the city nor the private sector took action after the summit. Instead, 16 months later, the city deployed groups of police officers on foot, horseback, 4-wheelers, and cars to defend the Plaza, a posh shopping district, from youths. Similarly, after a shooting in the P&L in 2008, the president of Cordish sent Mayor Funkhouser an angry email saying, “VISIBLE POLICE PRESENCE IS THE SINGLE MOST POWERFUL WAY TO REASSURE PEOPLE AS TO THE SAFETY OF AN AREA. IN ADDITION, THE POLICE SHOULD MAKE IT CLEAR TO ALL GANGS THAT THE DOWNTOWN IS AN AREA OF ‘ZERO TOLERANCE’” (Martin 2008:capital letters in



original). Once again, we find a strong rhetoric of zero tolerance, ranging from Cordish's outright statement to the city's threat of a \$500 fine for missing curfew.

The real effects of the curfew are heavily raced and classed. A majority of the youths in question are black, and many live in areas without amenities, such as movie theaters, that areas like the Plaza and P&L provide (Bradley 2011). By creating a differential curfew for entertainment areas and the rest of the city, the new policy effectively displaces the issue and communicates that those areas are valued over other sections of the city. It not only denies a largely black youth population the use of these entertainment spaces, it also works to protect these areas as places of white, middle-class consumption free of racial and class "others."

The above rhetoric and policies articulate together to suggest a concerted race and class remake of the central city consistent with Neil Smith's revanchist city theory (Smith 1996). The heavy emphasis on economic objectives to the detriment of social justice issues is also reflective of the elevation of "exchange value" above "use value" characteristic of Logan and Molotch's (1987) urban growth machine. The privatization of the very sidewalks in the P&L not only works to make once-public space available for economic gain, it also allows for more effective policing of the raced and classed boundaries created through city policies and actions. These same exclusionary strategies backed by economic rationale are also used to control the visibility and access of sexual "others" in the P&L, as the subsequent sections illustrate.

### *Regulating Sex*

In August 2004, Temptations, a full nudity strip club located near the P&L, petitioned the city for an expansion. With the expansion, Temptations would become semi-nude and be allowed to sell alcohol, which would subject it to stricter regulation and oversight from the city. To the delight of the city, Temptations would also remove the "Totally Nude" sign gracing the

façade of the building to be replaced by “classier” Penthouse franchise signage. But some were still concerned that having a strip club so near the P&L would be bad for business.

Before the expansion happened, the Missouri legislature passed a state law prohibiting full nudity and requiring that strippers wear pasties over their breasts. The law also mandated that performers be at least 10 feet from patrons on a stage with a railing and prohibited all physical contact and the showing of pornographic movies in private rooms. Lastly, the law required that all patrons and employees be at least 21 years old, even if the club does not serve alcohol. This was the latest in a series of laws aimed at adult businesses in Missouri<sup>7</sup>.

Citing depressed property values and “other negative secondary effects” such as prostitution, Matt Blunt, then governor of Missouri, stated that “I think it is appropriate for us to take action to curb activities at these types of businesses and to take good, positive steps to protect the health of citizens and of our state” (Hoover 2005). When available evidence is examined, however, neither of Governor Blunt’s reasons is justified. The director of the Neighborhood and Community Services Department of Kansas City, the agency charged with regulating adult businesses, stated that no sexually oriented businesses in Kansas City have had problems with prostitution. Moreover, the Crossroads District, the area where Temptations and another strip club, Bazookas, are located have experienced dramatic property value increases in recent years—so much so that many of the small businesses and art galleries in the area have petitioned City Hall for relief from sky-rocketing property taxes (Collison 2003a). The law never took effect before it was struck down by the Missouri Supreme Court for violating state restrictions on “log-rolling,” or tacking on unrelated amendments to bills in order to more easily push them through the legislature.

Temptations tried again for its expansion, but this time the Kansas City Parks and Recreation Department threatened to stop it. KC Parks and Recreation regulates Kansas City's boulevards, and Temptations is located on Grand Boulevard. Regulations passed in 2007 by the park board prohibit what it considers "seedy" businesses, including payday loan shops, used car lots, and adult businesses from existing along KC's boulevards. Temptations itself was grandfathered in because it had been located on Grand for decades, but its expansion was jeopardized.

Several people spoke against the expansion, claiming that adult businesses are morally corrupt and cause crime, disease, property devaluation, and blight. The local Catholic bishop and archbishop sent a letter warning "that a strip club...threatens to destroy the burgeoning family-friendly atmosphere of the downtown community" (Campbell 2008)—a curious argument considering the P&L's reputation as a drinking destination. Despite the controversy, the expansion was approved in a 5-2 vote, allowing Temptations to expand in exchange for the removal of its "totally nude" sign and sending the issue to the Planning and Zoning Committee for final approval. The Zoning Committee refused to hear the proposal, though, effectively killing the request. When questioned, the Chairman of the committee simply said that they were concerned that if they approved the request other sexually oriented businesses would try to open in the area, and that was not the message they wished to send (Star 2008).

The condemnation of two other sexually oriented businesses, the Gold Mine Lounge and Magic Touch Massage Parlor also illustrate this trend. The city invoked eminent domain against both establishments to clear land for the P&L. Similarly, Soakie's Lounge, a bar catering to a mostly black, gay, male clientele, was forced out of downtown. In June, 2004, the city simply denied Soakie's a renewal of its business license.

The P&L now stands in their place with a dress code that, among other things, prohibits sleeveless shirts on men and exposed undergarments, including undershirts, on men. Women, conversely, can wear practically whatever they want, and some businesses within the P&L demonstrate this with a flourish. At one bar waitresses wear chaps over bikini bottoms and low-cut tops. At another, women are encouraged to dance on elevated platforms around the dance floor while men are prohibited. Policies like these clearly announce that the P&L is an area where women are to be on display for men, and men should certainly not be looking to show off their bodies. On the one hand, conservative legislators argue that combining alcohol and undressed women is dangerous and will not be tolerated in order to legitimate legislation aimed at shutting down strip clubs (Kraske 2010). But on the other, they use tax payer money to subsidize an entertainment district full of bars with waitresses wearing revealing clothing and hosting events where the main attraction is porn star Jenna Jameson. It appears that the city simply traded one type of sexualized space for another, in line with Hubbard et al's (2008) assertion that society promotes certain forms of heterosexual expression through geographic placement of businesses.

This discourse and the resulting actions reveal how race, class, gender, and sexuality are all implicated in the remake of downtown. Sex and race become associated with decreased property values because they detract from the image of the central city as a safe space for white, middle-class consumption (Gotham 2002; Papayanis 2000), and are therefore treated in similar ways. Because pornography and sex work are often associated with the lower classes (Knopp 1995), a class dimension is also suggested. Threatening sexualities, such as sex work, pornography, and queers who do not conform to white, middle-class, heteronormative standards are thus framed as contributing to blight and moral degradation of urban areas, which legitimizes

their exclusion and allows growth machine actors to create a dystopian image of the areas inhabited by such sexualized businesses and sexual citizens. As Jane Ward (2008) argues, these elements of the queer community are no longer included in what mainstream LGBT organizations and their corporate sponsors see as marketable diversity. That is, they are too foreign, too threatening to the general sexphobic public, and they are therefore excluded from areas of public visibility, especially cosmopolitan urban renewal areas.

Clearing away sexual and racial “blight” through eminent domain and other governmental mechanisms allows these once-public and semi-public spaces to be privatized for capital accumulation, and legislating particular locations that are appropriate for “non-conforming” sexualities (e.g. not on boulevards, not within 1,000 feet of a church, park, etc.) effectively institutionalizes these spatial inequities. Moreover, a dress code that normalizes particular gender and sexual expressions contributes to a hierarchical defining of “good” and “bad” sexual citizens based on the morality of a largely white, male, heterosexual, bourgeois elite. These developments suggest that moral boundaries are being reified in space and law, resulting in real inequalities—in this case, unequal access to public space.

### *Power the Light with Pride*

In 2010, Show Me Pride, LLC, the organization that coordinates Kansas City Gay Pride, held part of the festival in the Power and Light District amid vocal opposition from some in the queer community. At issue were not only the racism allegations (which affect people of color in the queer community), but also the gendered and heterosexist tone of the dress code. The dress code reads “no sleeveless shirts on men, no exposed undergarments, including undershirts on men.” While this seems innocuous on its surface, the subtle modifier *on men* certainly contributes to a heterosexing and gendering of the space. Why is it okay for undergarments to be

exposed on women but not on men? As suggested above, the language tacitly suggests that this is a space in which women are to be gazed upon, not men. Other issues arise for different groups in the queer community, as well. Transgender women who dress as women but do not yet “pass” (or choose not to pass) as such may be denied entry if they decide to wear a tank top, for instance. Protesters made it clear that they understood the issues at stake, waving signs that read “They want your money not your pride” and “If I can dress like a slut, why can’t he?”

According to Jonathan, a 25 year old queer social activist, the most pressing issue for protesters was the dress code, which they viewed as classist, racist, gendered, homophobic, and transphobic. In addition to the issues for transgender people and the heterosexing and gendering mentioned above, the original dress code also banned white T-shirts, exposed jewelry on men, baggy clothing, sports attire, hats, shirts hanging below pants pockets, shorts below the calf (excluding capris on women), and work boots among other things. Opponents of the dress code argued that it targeted black men and other minorities, especially due to complaints that white patrons wearing prohibited clothing were admitted while black patrons wearing similar clothing were not. Cordish claimed that the code was enforced evenly and denied any racism, but after a black city councilwoman’s son was denied entry to the P&L because of his attire, the Kansas City Council took action. On April 2, 2009 the council passed an ordinance restricting dress codes in any development receiving tax payer assistance, doing away with the P&L bans on jewelry on men, headgear, pant length, and white T-shirts, though white *undershirts* were still prohibited.

Despite the changes, complaints of racial discrimination continued, and the Kansas City Human Rights Commission acted. It conducted a study in which 11 similarly dressed males between the ages of 22 and 32 were sent to try to enter the central pavilion of the P&L and a

business within the district. Three of the men were white, 5 were black, and 3 were Latino. The test showed that the white men were admitted 100% of the time (even though one was wearing excessively long athletic shorts), while the men of color were only admitted 44% of the time, or 9 out of their 16 attempts. Despite the announcement of these findings in November 2009, Cordish refused to admit wrong-doing or attempt to make amends. Instead it offered to hire a third-party contractor to enforce the dress code with a board of community members to oversee the contractor. But as one local newspaper points out:

The hiring of a contractor to enforce the code and the proposed community oversight board do little more than provide a mechanism to shift accountability away from Cordish. Future complaints from would-be patrons? Tell the board, not Cordish. Unannounced tests show problems with enforcement (as happened in a recent city test)? Then the board should fire the contractor” (Kansas City Business Journal Editorial 2009).

Moreover, while the oversight board nominally seeks diverse community representation, several prominent black leaders refused to participate out of protest. Jonathan also says he was offered a seat on the board, but when he expressed interest he was never contacted again. Almost seven months later in May, 2010, with Kansas City Gay Pride coming to the P&L (along with its accompanying protest) and two national black conventions coming to Kansas City in the following months, the P&L quietly changed its dress code again. The newly revised code reads, “The following is not permitted under the KC Live! dress code: sleeveless shirts on men; profanity on clothing; sweat pants or full sweat suits; bandanas; exposed undergarments (including undershirts) on men” ([www.powerandlightdistrict.com](http://www.powerandlightdistrict.com)). Anecdotal evidence continues to suggest that P&L does not consistently enforce its dress code. Blake, a gay, white man in his 20s, was denied entry to the P&L area because he was wearing a deep V-neck shirt that the bouncer judged to reveal too much male skin. Blake judged his shirt to be no different from the men already admitted who were wearing button-down shirts unbuttoned enough to

reveal the same chest area that his shirt exposed, but the bouncer's decision stood. He was not allowed access even to the outdoor central pavilion area (interview with Blake). Likewise, Julie, a self-identified "butch lesbian" in her early 20s, claimed that she was denied entry because she was wearing a tank top even though the dress code allows tank tops on women. She believes it was because of her gender presentation, which, in accordance with her butch identity, is conventionally masculine (interview with Julie).

Much of this controversy affects people of color and lower socioeconomic status, so the organizers of the Pride protest were often questioned about their motivation. Jonathan explains:

The most infuriating question during all of this was, like, we got it all the time. "I understand the district is racist. That's not a question in my mind. But what does that have to do with the gay community?" That is just such an infuriating question to me and the other organizers—that that is what the gay community is perceived as—totally white and homogenous, which is not what it is. We felt that defending that idea that we're not all white, upper-middle class, willing to just hang out at the bars instead of community space. We felt that that was too important not to protest (Jonathan, queer, white, male).

Jonathan's sentiment here draws attention to an area of significant controversy within the LGBTQ communities, namely that the community as a whole is perceived to be (mostly) white, (mostly) male, and generally economically privileged (Gamson 2004; Maynard 2004; Valocchi 1999). This image has been honed over many years by gay businesses and media, which have pursued a "normalization-via-consumption" strategy (Chasin 2000; Sender 2004). That is, while queers have gained increased visibility in the media, the representations are often stereotyped images of gay men as master consumers, such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* in which five gay men (each an expert in a particular area of consumption: food, culture, home, fashion, body) make a straight man "better" by teaching him how to become a master consumer himself. Such representations reify a class-specific image of the LGBTQ community as being firmly part of the upper-middle class (Gamson 2004)—an image that has been discredited by economists



(Badgett 2001). As Ward (2008:12) adds, this tactic “not only lends support to the misconception that all lesbians and gay men are white, middle class, and invested in being normal, but it also drains queer politics of its most countercultural and critical impulses.” This leads directly to the second issue with holding Gay Pride in the P&L. Should Pride be held in an area billed as the consumption capital of the region, especially when the company does not have a particularly good track record on civil rights?

*They want your money, not your Pride*

After Show Me Pride deemed the 2010 event in the P&L a success, the organization decided to move the entire festival to the P&L for 2011. In order to experience the move first-hand, I attended the Power the Light with Pride kick-off event on June 3, 2011 with my boyfriend, whom I asked to wear a tank-top. We were both admitted with no questions asked, and as I soon discovered so were many other people in violation of the dress code. As it turns out, the P&L dropped the dress code for the three-day Pride festival. During Pride, P&L decided, it was okay for men to wear sleeveless shirts. According to a P&L official, the reasoning was as follows:

[W]hen there’s an expectation that, you know, in particular, sleeveless shirts on men is something that’s not on the dress code, and there were going to be a lot of men wearing sleeveless shirts. For that reason it wasn’t practical to have it in place (Mark, heterosexual, white, male).

This was a notable exception to his earlier claim during our interview that the dress code was for everyone’s safety. The P&L’s motivations seemed more transparent when I asked how sales during Pride weekend compared with an average weekend: “[I]t was a strong weekend... it was one of the better weekends of the year. It definitely had a positive impact on sales” (interview with Mark). When I put the same issue to David, a Show Me Pride representative, asking what happens to our community in the P&L the other 362 days of the year, he responded positively:

...as one of our protesters said last year when we did the street dance, “So for 5 hours they’re gonna relax their dress code? Five hours—that’s just not enough. That’s just stupid and how dare you see that as an advance.” Well, it was 5 hours last year. It was 3 days this year. And who knows what might happen if we continue to go and show them that dress really isn’t critical or crucial to the success of or decline of your area (David, gay, white, male).

But the question consuming many in the LGBTQ community is why we would choose to have Gay Pride in an area that only welcomes us as we are for three days of the year.

One of the primary justifications offered by Show Me Pride for moving the festival to P&L has been financial. According to Show Me Pride’s financial records the move to P&L was an economic windfall for the organization, saving it over \$80,000 in expenses to put on the festival. P&L provided security, restrooms, a stage, utilities, and various other amenities that normally cost thousands of dollars. From a financial standpoint, holding Pride at the P&L is completely justified.

These financial concerns, however, dovetail with other concerns that members of the Kansas City queer community have. Namely, should the queer community be financially and politically supporting an organization that only appears to support the queer community three days of the year, and should Show Me Pride’s primary concern be saving \$80,000 instead of providing a location where all members of the community can feel welcome and safe? These questions point to a concern that Kansas City now shares with many other pride festivals: “the growth of gay capitalism and the corporate sponsorship of ‘pride’ have naturalized the logic that pride events are opportunities for tremendous revenue...and, as such, these opportunities should go to the *best* organizations, vis-à-vis competition” (Ward 2003:88). But as Ward also asserts, “the accessibility and character of the locale is important as well” (2003:87). During our interview, David stated that he felt safer and more comfortable in the P&L than he did in a park or on the streets of the Crossroads District and that he believed patrons of Pride felt the same. It

is significant to note that David is a white, middle-aged, male business owner (and so presumably financially comfortable), as are many of the members of the Show Me Pride executive board. It certainly seems reasonable to assume that people with those traits would feel comfortable in an area described by the developers as having a “refined loft” architectural style. It remains the case, however, that many in the queer community do not feel the way David does, and many have experienced discrimination in the area. Several interviewees also expressed feelings that the very essence of Pride had changed with the move to the P&L.

Well, with the other venues...everybody looks forward to gay pride because that's the weekend that you get the opportunity to just be yourself. You're around people. You can just be free. That spirit is not there at the P&L because you have to dress a certain way, you have to conduct yourself to a certain standard, and all that wasn't involved when we would come to the park (Gary, gay, black, male).

I observed during my fieldwork that Pride did, in fact, seem toned down. Absent were the usual barrage of leather-daddies, drag queens, and shirtless men, suggesting, as Binnie and Skeggs (2004) note of Manchester's gay village, that as heterosexuals are courted, the more extreme aspects of queer culture are downplayed or excluded.

Because of the continued unrest over moving Pride to the P&L, Show Me Pride held a community input meeting to consider other venues for the 2012 festival. The demographic composition of the audience is worth considering in the following account. Not including my boyfriend and me, who sat in the back as neutral observers, there were 19 white men, mostly middle-aged and older, 3 men of color, 1 straight, white woman, and 2 young, white lesbians.

During the meeting, those in attendance agreed on the following criteria for choosing a venue: size, parking/transportation, accessibility, utilities, safety, amenities, cost, layout, inclusivity/how welcoming the venue is, is the administration a good partner. The group further decided that the three most important factors were, in this order, accessibility, cost, and parking.

The conversation during the meeting, however, suggested that cost was the top priority. When ratings were given for categories such as parking, safety, and utilities, public venues such as parks were graded down because it would cost money to provide such services, whereas a venue such as P&L includes these things.

The debate over the term “inclusivity” seemed particularly telling. A middle-aged white man representing the Human Rights Campaign suggested that inclusivity be defined as welcoming people other than queers during Pride so as to pull in people that wouldn’t normally come to such an event but are open to learning about it. Clearly, such a definition would favor the P&L as a heavily trafficked night-life scene in Kansas City. One of the young, white lesbians suggested that we consider instead how diverse members of our community feel in the space and whether they feel welcome before we consider catering to heterosexuals. Her suggestion was readily dismissed by an executive board member of Show Me Pride as a utopian vision. We will never satisfy everyone in our community, he bluntly argued, implying that even attempting to do so was foolish. This back and forth between the two lesbians and various men characterized the debate over inclusivity, with the lesbians offering stories of discrimination in the P&L, as well as accounts of women with children who did not feel comfortable attending Pride in a designated drinking area, or youth who could not attend for various reasons associated with P&L’s image as a bar district, and the men offering nebulous rebuttals such as everyone will feel uncomfortable somewhere and the perception of P&L as only a bar district is incorrect. The male-female dynamic here is particularly noteworthy, and has been the subject of feminist critiques of LGBT organizations (Ward 2008). In the end, the audience reached no decision on inclusivity, and each venue was graded “Ok,” effectively eliminating inclusivity as a criterion.

Not only was inclusivity—perhaps the most damning factor for P&L—dismissed, but as mentioned above, accessibility, cost, and parking were prioritized over inclusivity, safety, and whether the venue administration is a good partner to the LGBTQ community. As a modern facility the P&L obviously would score well on accessibility and parking, and as a private company the P&L was able to make donations to Show Me Pride to keep costs down. That is, Show Me Pride was given a reduced price in exchange for making P&L the lead sponsor of the festival. Because P&L was expected to score highly (and did) on these three variables and because accessibility, cost, and parking were weighted four, three, and two times greater, respectively, it was a foregone conclusion that P&L would score the highest. A comment from David perhaps sums up Show Me Pride’s justification: “Maybe at some point when the straight bars down there [the P&L] realize that gay people are a lot more fun and *have more money* than the straight people...the Power and Light District could be our gayborhood” (interview with David; emphasis added).

The decision to hold Pride in a designated consumption area and to bill the LGBTQ community as affluent reinforces the “normalization-via-consumption” paradigm, encouraging conspicuous consumption as the route to full citizenship. Figure 1, a poster used by Show Me Pride to recruit sponsors, illustrates this approach. Furthermore, seeking to make Pride welcoming to heterosexuals rather than queers suggests a heteronormative agenda, what Lisa Duggan (2002) calls the “new homonormativity.” This approach is in line with the mainstream LGBT movement’s choice to pursue “rights traditionally granted to white, middle-class heterosexuals, such as privacy, domesticity, and consumption” (Ward 2008:12) rather than cultural acceptance. Moving Pride from a public park to a privatized shopping district also valorizes public relations based on the interests of private property and capital accumulation, and

undercuts the original intent of Pride celebrations as radical acts of queer visibility meant to disrupt hegemonic scripts. Ultimately, the same economic rationale that characterizes the larger revanchist enterprise applies to sexuality, as well. Non-hegemonic sexual expressions are eliminated or excluded in order to secure the area for white, middle-class, (largely) heterosexual consumption, and non-threatening sexual “others” (i.e. white, middle-class, gay men) are courted to lend the P&L legitimacy as a welcoming and diverse space. Sexual diversity is thus co-opted and mobilized by corporate real estate developers and local government in a very race-, class-, and gender-specific manner that at once advances growth objectives and reinforces the white, heterosexual, middle-class values of heteronormativity, private property, and conspicuous consumption.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

## **Conclusion**

Like New York’s Times Square, Kansas City’s Power and Light District serves as another example of a revanchist urban renewal strategy. City officials, in tandem with real estate and business professionals, focused on economic goals to the detriment of social justice issues, resulting in an urban space infused with a bourgeois morality that reflects, promulgates and engenders social inequalities along the axes of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Rather than creating an inclusive public space Kansas City has created an exclusive pseudo-public space intended for white, middle-class consumers. Within this configuration, non-hegemonic sexualities are alternately courted or excluded in line with the goals of the growth machine. On the one hand, exclusionary policies regarding “threatening” sexual expressions, such as sex work, pornography, and non-white, non-middle-class portions of the LGBTQ community work to institutionalize and territorialize white, bourgeois conceptions of sexual morality in order to

sanitize urban space for white, middle-class consumption. On the other, middle-class, white, gay men are courted by growth machine actors as ideal consumers and gentrifiers, and to lend a marketable aura of diversity and cosmopolitanism to Kansas City's renewed spaces.

While revanchist attitudes were largely uncontested in the discourse surrounding urban renewal, the fact that the KC Police Department was unwilling to enforce a harsh panhandling ordinance and that Mayor Funkhouser attempted to make social justice a viable issue suggests that some individual growth machine actors are not concerned only with economic objectives. Funkhouser's failure and the persistence of the panhandling law, however, demonstrate how ingrained growth objectives are. While this single-city study is limited in its generalizability, the findings observed in Kansas City add to our understanding of sexuality's role in urban renewal, particularly how sexualities are mobilized by growth machine actors to create exclusive consumer spaces. Conventional wisdom is that gay men are gentrifiers because of their willingness to move into dilapidated areas and use their cultural and economic capital to transform these neighborhoods. These findings suggest a reevaluation of this analysis in light of the changing nature of gentrification as an organized economic activity. The Kansas City case suggests that gay men may now be courted by large-scale urban renewal actors instead of becoming first-wave gentrifiers themselves.

This study also brings up issues of access to public space and sexual equality. Access to public space is a long-held component of citizenship in a democratic society, and movements for sexual citizenship have therefore often sought legitimation through visibility in public spaces. The increasing privatization of once-public spaces limits these movements for sexual equality and acceptance, especially when sexual minorities themselves condone, intentionally or not, such capital accumulation strategies that tokenize queers. Radical sexual spaces should strive to

disrupt hegemonic sexual and moral scripts rather than legitimate them. Given the tendency for capital to commodify queer space, however, future research should seek to understand how these spatial dynamics are affecting claims to sexual equality and sexual citizenship, and how, why, and under what conditions queers become co-opted in redefining space. In recent years, the LGBTQ movement has largely argued for equality on economic and political grounds. As former director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Urvashi Vaid (1995:106), writes: "We consciously chose legal reform, political access, visibility, and legitimation over the long-term goals of cultural acceptance, social transformation, understanding, and liberation." Queer public spaces have the potential to advance arguments for equality on these cultural and social fronts through encouraging a true appreciation of diversity, but only when the public sphere and public spaces are truly public.

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**Figure 1 – KC Gay Pride Advertisement**



**Appendix 1 – Interviewees**

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Position</i>
Jonathan	Queer social activist
David	KC Pride officer
Gary	KC Black Gay Pride officer
Blake	Gay Community member
Julie	Lesbian community member
Mark	Power and Light official
James	Urban planner

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<sup>1</sup> Florida asserts that people in the “creative class”—artists, architects, engineers, etc.—seek and are accepting of diversity, and thus, one way to attract this group (which increasingly drives the American economy) is to create a diverse or cosmopolitan environment.

<sup>2</sup> Privatism is the belief that the market is the best way to allocate resources and that it is government’s job to support the market in order to maximize individual choice and freedom (Squires 1994; Antonio and Bonanno 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Symbolic boundaries are social and cultural distinctions that define some people, groups, and things while excluding others (Epstein 2002).

<sup>4</sup> I refer here to standpoint epistemology’s assertion that knowledge is produced in a particular matrix of physical location, history, material interests, and culture (Sprague 2005).

<sup>5</sup> From 1997-2003 (Barnes began in 1999), TIF payments to developers almost quadrupled, increasing from \$10 million to \$39 million annually. That translates into almost 9% of city sales taxes and a resultant loss of \$10.7 million per year from the city treasury for projects that did not earn enough through TIF to pay developers (KC Star 12-18-03). Shortcomings in TIF must be paid by the city itself.

<sup>6</sup> Cincinnati and Cleveland, OH, Fort Worth, TX, Minneapolis, MN, and Charlotte, NC have all undertaken major downtown projects without granting tax incentives to private capital.

<sup>7</sup> A 2003 law raised the minimum age for nude dancers from 18 to 19, and a 2004 statute banned sexually oriented billboards within a mile of state highways.